



# Gurabain

where the saltwater meets the freshwater

**Jenine Boeree & Nicole Monks**

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that this resource contains images of deceased persons.*

Georges River Council acknowledges the Bidjigal people of the Eora Nation, who are the Traditional Custodians of all lands, waters and sky in the Georges River area.

We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who live work and meet on these lands.

*Guraban* is presented in collaboration with the Gujaga Foundation and supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.



Front page image: *Thalanara yalimanha (making kangaroo skin blankets)*, 2022, collection of the artists. Photography: Silversalt Photography

## ARTISTS

Jenine Boeree and Nicole Monks are a mother and daughter pair who work collaboratively to create artworks which explore their connection to their Indigenous heritage.

Jenine Boeree is a Yamaji Wajarri woman who was born in Perth on Noongar Country in 1956. She is a renowned tactile artist and uses her artmaking practice as a way of connecting to country. Jenine is a member of the Stolen Generations. The intergenerational work she creates with her daughter Nicole help her to heal the wounds of this experience. She reconnected with her mob Yamaji Wajarri from the Murchison region in Western Australia in 2007.

Nicole Monks is a Yamaji Wajarri woman who also has Dutch and English heritage. Her artmaking is influenced by her cross-cultural background. She uses artmaking to connect the past with the present and the future. She aims to tell stories which encourage audiences to question and discuss ways in which Indigenous people have been treated in Australia. She is also interested in Aboriginal approaches to sustainability and collaboration.

Their artwork *Thalanara yalimanha (making kangaroo skin blankets)* pairs traditional handmade kangaroo skin cloaks with blankets which are printed with the words New South Wales Aborigines. Blankets like these were mass produced and given to Aboriginal people by the colonial New South Wales government to replace kangaroo skin cloaks and blankets as the traditional practice of making these items was banned.

By juxtaposing these two items Boeree and Monks invite their audience to explore the history of Indigenous people. The act of making new cloaks by hand creates a bridge between cultural practices of the past and Indigenous people today.



Image: Govt. agents distributing blankets to Aboriginals, c.1890-1898, Facsimile photograph, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Call no: PX\*D 398



Image: *Thalanara yalimanha (making kangaroo skin blankets)*, 2022, collection of the artists. Photography: Silversalt Photography



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## Thalanara yalimanha (making kangaroo skin blankets)

Kangaroo cloaks are a significant cultural belonging, many have symbolic moiety and totemic inscriptions.

The cultural practice of making cloaks including kangaroo and possum skins happen around Australia, from Bidjigal Country, NSW (here) to Yamaji Country, WA (our mob).

Making a Kangaroo cloak is a long and laborious process. Made after hunting and skinning a kangaroo in a singular piece, any excess fat is removed and then tanned (on Yamaji country this is done with a particular wattle seed from around byro), it is stretched and dried for a long period of time before it is cured. Multiple skins can be stitched together (using a French seam) with bone needles and sinew from the Kangaroo tail. They are extremely soft providing warmth and protection, depending on the weather and cloaks could be worn both fur in and fur out to suit.

However, Cultural practice and language were forbidden by the colonists, and Kangaroo and Possum Skin Cloaks and cloak making skills were not allowed, the government replacing them with blankets labelled 'NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINES'. It is remembered not as an attempt to achieve security through reciprocity, but as a symbol of paternalism and dependency.

By issuing the blankets the colonists had unwittingly chosen an item which, in its traditional skin form, was a potent element of Aboriginal gift exchange. David Dunlop magistrate at Wollombi explained thus

' any encroachment on each other's boundaries occasions much hostile feelings betwixt the tribes. Sometimes the price for peace must be either a young gin, or an opossum cloak... Their simple nature understood thus, that the Governor sold their grounds to people... and that in lieu thereof he gave blankets.'

By participating in the annual distribution of blankets, Aboriginal people sought to contain the overwhelming European threat, restore some semblance of order to a world now shared with Europeans, who were at least meeting some traditional obligations, and ensure a measure of security for themselves. Their hopes proved illusionary.

### References

Reclaiming tradition and re-affirming cultural identity through creating Kangaroo Skin Cloaks and Possum Skin Cloaks Volume 1 | Issue 1 | Article 2 – Riley, Published by Te Rau Matatini, 2016

Amanda Nettelbeck, 'Bracelets, blankets, and badges of distinction: Aboriginal subjects and Queen Victoria's gifts in Canada and Australia' in Sarah Carter and Maria Nugent, eds., *Mistress of Everything: Queen Victoria in Indigenous Worlds* (Manchester University Press, 2016).

Jenine Boeree & Nicole Monks



## FRAMES

- Cultural:** Constructs of identity, race, merging of historical and contemporary experience.
- Structural:** Visual symbols embedded in the material and form. Interpretation is conveyed throughout the artmaking process.
- Subjective:** Works are linked to memory and experience
- Postmodern:** Challenging the interpretation of historical objects, stories, and figures. Recontextualising historical objects by viewing them through a contemporary perspective on racism.

## Subject – People, Objects, Places and Spaces

### KEY WORDS

- Collaborative:** Two more more artists working together to create an artwork.
- Intergenerational:** Involving people of two or more generations such as parents, children and grandparents.
- Moiety:** An Indigenous kinship system based on the idea that everything can be divided into two halves. This includes a person and their environment. Each half mirrors the other to create a whole.
- Totemic:** An Indigenous kinship system in which people are linked to the environment, land, water animals and geographical features.
- Reciprocity:** When people have an equal exchange of goods or services.
- Paternalism:** A system under which a government limits or restricts the freedoms and choices of people under their authority.

## ACTIVITIES

### Stage 4

- Look at the photograph of the 'New South Wales Aborigines' blanket. Write 5 words to describe the way you imagine the blanket feels.
- Look at the photograph of the kangaroo skin cloak. Write 5 words to describe the way you imagine the cloak feels.
- Do you think the cloak or the blanket would bring more comfort and warmth if you were to wear it?

### Stage 5

- Reading the text 'New South Wales Aborigines', do you think that the New South Wales government viewed Aboriginal people as individuals?
- When compared to the 'New South Wales Aborigines' blanket, how does the hand-crafted cloak become a symbol for the individual in *Thalanara yalimanha* (making kangaroo skin blankets)?

# ACTIVITIES

## Stage 6

- By placing a traditional kangaroo skin cloak in a gallery setting, Boeree and Monks recontextualize its value to a broader Australian audience. Think about how an item like this may have been viewed by mainstream Australia in the past and discuss how Boeree and Monks might want this perception to change.
- Read the text titled *thalanara yalimanha (making kangaroo skin blankets)*. Reflect on the processes used to create a kangaroo skin blanket. Explain how creating one is a way for Jenine Boeree to connect to country.

## Essay Questions

- Consider Jenine Boeree's and Nicole Monks' connections to the lived experience of the Stolen Generations. Explore ways in which their investigation of colonial Indigenous history is linked to their own experiences.
- Explore ways in which artists challenge their audiences to question traditional or mainstream points of view.

## DISCOVER

**Artist Instagram** @nicole\_monks

### Past exhibitions

'Barangga: First Nations Design' 17 Jun - 30 Jul 2023, UNSW Galleries <https://www.artdesign.unsw.edu.au/unsw-galleries/barangga-first-nations-design>

'Devil devil' 7 Apr - 1 May 2022, 107 On The Rocks Festival <https://www.therocks.com/whats-on/campaigns/107-on-the-rocks>

'(Re)telling: Stories of Country and Truth' 15 Jun - 9 Jul 2023, Art Space on the Concourse, Chatswood <https://www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au/Events/Retelling-Stories-of-Country-and-Truth>

### Collections

'Nyinajimanha (Sitting Together)' 2016, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences <https://collection.maas.museum/object/570549>

### Article

'Devil devil, Australia's 'first pandemic' through the lens of two Aboriginal artists' 22 Apr 2022, SBS <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/nitv-radio/en/podcast-episode/devil-devil-australias-first-pandemic-through-the-lens-of-two-aboriginal-artists/uhq1p86sb>

# Guraban

where the saltwater meets the freshwater

29 October 2022 – 29 January 2023  
Hurstville Museum & Gallery

Combining historical material and objects, documents and photographs sourced from public and private collections along with the work of leading First Nations visual artists, Jenine Boeree & Nicole Monks, Dennis Golding, Djon Mundine, Marilyn Russell and Jason Wing, the exhibition presents stories associated with the Georges River in the local region, highlighting multiple perspectives on Aboriginal connections to the river, its people and places.

It has been developed in collaboration with local First Nations groups, individuals, artists and the Gujaga Foundation, a peak organisation leading Dharawal language and cultural activities, providing services relating to Aboriginal culture in eastern, southern and southwestern Sydney. The commissioned artworks have been made possible through funding from Create NSW.

*A hardcopy and digital catalogue is available for this exhibition.*

*A virtual tour of this exhibition is available to view online [here](#).*

## **HURSTVILLE MUSEUM & GALLERY**

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Back cover image: 'Guraban: where the saltwater meets the freshwater' exhibition view, Hurstville Museum & Gallery, 2022.  
(detail) Photography: Silversalt.



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